

PA Secondary Transition Initiative Communities of Practice

Transition in Pennsylvania is becoming a shared responsibility across agencies that are parties to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Memorandum of Understanding (IDEA-MOU). Ten offices from four state agencies comprise the IDEA-MOU partnership (Education, Labor and Industry, Public Welfare and Health). The IDEA-MOU, enacted in December, 1999 identifies how services for youth with disabilities will be provided and coordinated in the state by identifying agency responsibility for services, agency financial responsibility, conditions and terms of reimbursement, procedures to address interagency disputes, and procedures for coordinating services. While this agreement covers services for students with disabilities at all levels, it has been especially important in launching the cross-systems planning and professional development efforts for the state's Secondary Transition Initiative.

The IDEA-MOU Interagency Team is comprised of individuals who work in the following state offices:

- Department of Education
 - Bureau of Special Education
 - Bureau of Career and Technical Education
- Department of Labor and Industry
 - Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Office of Workforce Investment
- Department of Public Welfare
 - Office of Mental Retardation
 - Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
 - Office of Children Youth and Families
 - Office of Medical Assistance
- Department of Health
 - Bureau of Family Health
 - Bureau of Drug and Alcohol

While not a formal party to the IDEA-MOU, Parent Education Network (PEN), the Parent Training and Information Center in Pennsylvania is an important partner in the planning, development and delivery of all of the transition training initiatives.

Since the inception of the IDEA-MOU, and the initial meetings of the interagency team, the principles of a Community of Practice (CoP) have been advanced by creating a shared agenda to support the successful transition of students to post-secondary outcomes including post-secondary education and training, employment, and community participation.

Pennsylvania's CoP focusing on secondary transition embraces the essential elements of a community. The members are a learning community who share a common interest and responsibility to provide services to youth with disabilities transitioning from school to adult

services, and the team has agreed to come together to expand the knowledge, experience and leveraging power of the group. The IDEA-MOU Interagency Team has a shared vision and is goal oriented and results focused. They place emphasis on understanding each member's role, recognizing the validity of all interests and continuously ask who is not represented within the group.

The COP for transition has gained visibility and momentum within the last several years through several cross-systems training activities. In the fall of 2000, a series of meetings were held in seven locations across the state. In planning for one of the first statewide trainings, the IDEA-MOU Interagency Team met and had several discussions regarding how to advance an interagency approach to service delivery for students with disabilities. They concluded that local service providers had to have a basic understanding of the range of services provided by schools and other agencies before they could be expected to invite or be invited to the table to cooperatively plan for and provide services to students and clients. These first meetings provided that information by having staff from each of the departments and member offices and bureaus present basic information about programs, services, and contact information. A cross-systems audience including educators, agency staff, and parents attended the training.

The IDEA-MOU and description of programs and services of the partners can be seen by visiting <http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us>, and clicking on the transition link.

Since that first training there have been several joint trainings offered. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

DATE	EVENT
10/01	Successful Outcomes of Students with Disabilities: A Student Focused Approach – National Teleconference developed through Parent Education Network (PEN) in cooperation with MOU-IDEA agencies and the Rehabilitation Services Administration
10 - 11/01	Promoting Effective Outcomes: A Cross Systems Approach - 3 statewide meetings provided to a cross agency audience
6/02	2002 PA Transition Conference: Promoting Successful Post-school Outcome Models
10/02	2002 PA Disability Mentoring Day: Kick-off Event
1/03	Promoting Self-Determination Skills of Youth with Disabilities in Transition Planning: An Interagency Team Transition Team Approach – 3 statewide meetings provided to a cross agency audience
5/03	Cross Systems Assessment Strategies for Secondary Students with Disabilities - 3 statewide meetings provided to a cross agency audience
6/03	PA Transition Conference: Creating Communities of Practice-Shared Visions for Successful Transition of Students with

Sustaining the Community

The members of the IDEA-MOU Interagency Team realize that in addition to working on shared projects it is equally as important to focus on enhancing their working relationships in the CoP. The team has identified the following guiding principles for promoting their shared vision on secondary transition and for moving that shared vision forward:

The guiding principles to implement this vision include:

- Identifying common goals
- Continuously working as a team
- Assuring ongoing communication with all team members
- Building relationships with team members
- Maintaining a welcoming demeanor
- Focusing on student outcomes
- Valuing parent partnerships
- Valuing the opinions of all stakeholders
- Building trust across all team members
- Having mutual respect among team members
- Building networks and relationships across "systems" and audiences
- Valuing one another's perspectives
- Creating transition strategies and activities based upon the bigger picture
- Building the foundation...collaborate, cooperate, and communicate

To move the guiding principles into action, the IDEA-MOU Interagency Team suggests that it is necessary to:

- Recognize roadblocks
- Work through issues
- Focus on priorities
- Foster creativity
- Work with a futuristic attitude
- Keep a student-centered focus
- Encourage self-determination practices

Finally, understanding that there are “real world problems” to recognize and address and that the issues are universal and not owned by a particular group or groups. They include:

- Communication breakdowns

- Turf issues
- Money issues
- Staff turnover
- Differing priorities and language
- Lack of relationships and mutual respect
- Lack of opportunity to network.

Cross-System Efforts to Promote Post-Secondary Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities through a Shared Vision

The priority of transition of students with disabilities is also evident in the state policy efforts of the IDEA-MOU partners. Policy actions and program guidance have been issued by many of the partners to their respective field staff in support of the interagency work needed to expand opportunities for youth with disabilities in transitioning to post-school outcomes.

- On September 8, 2000 a joint memorandum was issued by the Bureau of Special Education and the Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Programs affirming the roles and responsibilities outlined by the IDEA-MOU.
- On October 4, 2002, a Mental Health and Substance Abuse Bulletin was issued *The Roles and Responsibilities of County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Programs in the Development of a Child's Individual Education Program*, which can be viewed at http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/omhsas/OmhsasBulletin/Omhsas_MouChildEduPlan00-04.asp.
- A bulletin entitled *Performance Expectations and Recommended Guidelines for the County Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)* was jointly issued by Deputy Secretaries for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Medical Assistance Programs; Children, Youth, and Families; Mental Retardation; Juvenile Court Judges' Commission; Health Promotion And Disease Prevention; Elementary and Secondary Education; Department of Health; and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, which reinforced the principles of cross-systems collaboration (http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/omhsas/OmhsasBulletin/Omhsas_PerfExpectRecGuideForCASSP.asp).
- In the spring of 2002, the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) began funding five pilot projects that will support the transition of adolescents and young adults with mental disorders to adult life. Funds to support these projects are being made available through the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant funds. The five projects work in collaboration with a school district in the region to implement that component of the project.
- The Office of Mental Retardation is leading the development of local interagency teams to promote pilot projects to promote employment outcomes of youth with disabilities in three areas of the state.
- The Office of Children, Youth and Families promotes interagency collaboration through their *Program Improvement Plan for Child & Family Well Being Outcomes*, and especially encourages interagency participation and coordination of services through the *Chafee Independent Living Workgroup*.

- The State Youth Council also includes cross-agency participation and has included outreach to youth with disabilities in the priorities of the Council.
- The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) has played a leadership role in the IDEA-MOU efforts and the PA transition initiative. The administration of OVR has established transition as one of the top priorities of the agency. The State Plan, or the blueprint of the public VR program, has included transition goals since FY 2001. In FFY 2002, 34% of the total number of individuals served was under the age of 25 (national average = 28%).
- The mission of the Pennsylvania Training and Assistance Network is to support the efforts of the Bureau of Special Education and its initiatives and to build the capacity of local educational agencies to provide appropriate services to students who receive special education services. PaTTAN has taken a leadership role in the transition initiatives in Pennsylvania for many years, including the IDEA-MOU activities. The Bureau of Special Education, through the PaTTAN system, has provided the majority of the financial support of all training and technical assistance activities in Pennsylvania through IDEA and State Improvement Grant funds.
- Under the auspices of the Bureau of Special Education, a mini-grant program was designed and implemented during the 2002-03 school year to assist local education agencies (LEAs) in implementing research-based practices related to improving transition services to students with disabilities. The schools were required to commit to improving student results. All projects were expected to report quantitative data related to subsequent changes in student achievement and measurable objectives. Clear evaluative methods were required.
- Mentoring mini-grants (up to \$7,500) were available for those 2002 Transition Conference program participants that wished to enter into a mentoring relationship with others replicating a substantial part or all of their program or project. To qualify for a mini-grant of up to \$7,500 to replicate one of the transition mentor projects, a school district, charter school or approved private school team had to be comprised of an administrator, teacher, parent, local IU transition consultant, and a community agency representative. Agency participation was strongly encouraged and teams were required to attend the entire conference. Mini-grants were awarded in the following areas of transition: *employment community living/participation; career development/awareness; interagency & community partnerships; self-determination; transition assessment; post secondary education, interagency referral process*. Oversight of the mini-grants occurred through the PaTTAN system.
- In order to expand transition services in Pennsylvania, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, in partnership with the Department Education, is charting a new course through the design and implementation of a financial Memorandum of Understanding. Following final approval by the Department of Labor & Industry and Department of Education, 39 local and two statewide transition projects will be initiated in the fall of 2003. Each of the 39 local project fits into more than one category, as listed below:
 - Outreach-Underserved
 - Assessment (Vocational)
 - Mentoring
 - Employment
 - Post-Secondary Education and Training
 There are two statewide projects, as identified below:
 - Capacity Building (State and Local Training and Networking support)

- Needs Assessments:
 - Determining the feasibility of a cross-systems data sharing system to identify and track transitioning youth with disabilities across agency boundaries;
 - Gathering follow-up surveys current in use in PA; designing and piloting a post-secondary follow-up survey of youth with disabilities leaving the education system.
 - Establishing data elements and database design to compile data from the OVR Transition Projects, so OVR is in a position to do a multiple-year follow-up of the employment outcome of youth with disabilities and the potential impact of the project.

PA Transition Initiative Cross-Systems Training Agenda 2003-2004

To expand the communication network of the PA Transition Initiative, a list-serve is being formed in cooperation with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). That list-serve will be operational fall, 2003. The IDEA-MOU Interagency Team is currently developing an interactive web site to serve as the hub of information sharing.

The following cross-system agenda is also jointly planned by the IDEA-MOU Interagency Team. The events provide many opportunities for interagency teaming efforts. If you would like to view additional information and register for any of these events, at no charge, please visit the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) web site, located at www.pattan.k12.pa.us. Look for the Upcoming Events section.

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION
PA Disability Mentoring Day	October 8-9, 2003	State Level Event in Harrisburg
Building Transition Communities of Practice: Essential Elements for Building Local Interagency Transition Teams	September 15, 2003	PaTTAN, King of Prussia
	September 22, 2003	PaTTAN, Pittsburgh
	September 23, 2003	PaTTAN, Harrisburg
Building Transition Communities of Practice: Action Planning Strategies for Building Local Interagency Transition Teams	December 3, 2003 February 25, 2004	PaTTAN, King of Prussia
	December 5, 2003 February 23, 2004	PaTTAN, Harrisburg
	December 11, 2003 February 24, 2004	PaTTAN, Pittsburgh
Building Communities of Practice: Developing Cross-system Assessment Portfolios for Transitioning Youth	January 28, 2004 January 29, 2004 January 30, 2004	PaTTAN, King of Prussia PaTTAN, Harrisburg PaTTAN, Pittsburgh

PA Groundhog Day: Job Shadowing Experiences for Students with Disabilities	February, 2004	29 Intermediate Unit Regional Events
Building Communities of Practice: Practical Applications of Cross-systems Self-Determination Strategies for Transitioning Youth	April 13, 2004 April 14, 2004 April 15, 2004	PaTTAN, King of Prussia PaTTAN, Harrisburg PaTTAN, Pittsburgh
2004 PA Transition Conference	July 13-16, 2004	Penn Stater Conference Center, Penn State

The IDEA-MOU Interagency Team not only focuses on sharing information and training across systems, they are constantly working to create systemic change in Pennsylvania. The close working relationships and mutual respect for the perspective of all members fosters discussions related to policy and practice impacting transition services for youth with disabilities. The team has already initiated unprecedented practices through the jointly sponsored training events and conferences, as well as the joint funding of direct service projects but it won't stop there as this team, functioning as a CoP is always open to "pushing the envelope" to extend the cross systems policies and practices for providing transition services to youth with disabilities.

Developed by the PA IDEA/MOU Community of Practice
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